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ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

Theme for the high-level segment of the substantive session of 1998 of the Economic and Social Council

Note by the Secretary-General

1. In paragraph 53 of annex I to its resolution 50/227, the General Assembly decided that, with regard to the theme for the general debate of the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council, "the President of the Council, following consultations with Member States and, through the Secretary-General, with members of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, should present a proposal for a topical theme for the following year at the annual substantive session of the Council. At such session, the Council shall undertake consultations on the theme for the high-level segment with a view to reaching a decision, if possible, during the substantive session, but not later than at a resumed session in the autumn following the annual session". The present note is submitted pursuant to Assembly resolution 50/227 and at the request of the President of the Council to facilitate his consultations with Member States.

I. PROPOSALS OF MEMBER STATES

2. The Secretary-General consulted Member States through a letter dated 22 April 1997, as a result of which he received the following proposals for a theme:

(a) The Group of 77 and China: Employment and labour migration in the context of the process of globalization and liberalization;

(b) The States members of the European Union: New dimensions in international development cooperation. The European Union proposed that the objective would be to focus on strengthening partnership for development and finding new balances in development cooperation (for instance between multilateral and bilateral cooperation; between the role of Governments, private sector and civil society; between capacity building and other forms of cooperation) by analysing and drawing lessons from changes in the international and national contexts which are relevant for development cooperation. The needs of the poorest countries should particularly be addressed in this regard;

(c) The European Union, as an alternative: Advancement of women and implementation of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women. This would be in response to the request made by the Conference itself. Emphasis could be given to implementation at the national level;

(d) Jordan: Finance and sustainable development;

(e) Morocco proposed five possible themes:

(i) The relationship between economic choices, technological change and unemployment;

(ii) Relationship between relocation of activities to developing countries and increase in unemployment in developed countries;

(iii) Budgetary constraints of governments and their impact on vulnerable and marginalized groups of society;

(iv) Impact of safety nets and anti-poverty programmes on the rehabilitation of marginalized populations;

(v) Role of the State and of the international community in the twenty-first century for achieving a more equitable society, respectful of fundamental human rights, and in particular in promoting the means to secure for the human being the right to a life in dignity;

(f) Romania: The expansion of global information technologies and networks - international cooperation and impact on the economic, social and cultural development of States (as a means of enabling the Council to build on its past work in this area, address complexities in international cooperation linked to the large number of actors and examine aspects such as financing, technical harmonization and training);

(g) The Holy See proposed three possible themes:

(i) International cooperation for the sharing of technical know-how, as well as the evaluation of human resources within the poorest countries and social groups;

(ii) International cooperation for the fight against the various forms of economic criminal activity (violation of anti-trust laws, tax evasion, abuse of trusts, the establishment of firms as fronts for illicit activities, money laundering etc);

(iii) From exclusion to participation: international cooperation for the promotion of forms and instruments of popular participation in the life of the local, national, regional and international community.

II. PROPOSALS OF BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

3. The Secretary-General consulted the relevant bodies of the United Nations system through a letter dated 22 April 1997, as a result of which he received the following proposals for a theme:

(a) The United Nations Development Programme: Globalization;

(b) United Nations Population Fund: proposed four possible themes, which could have topical value in the context of several forthcoming reviews of international conferences:

(i) Human rights, especially women's human rights (combining the contexts of the human rights review conference scheduled for 1998 and the Secretary-General's commitment to the gender issue);

(ii) The global conference review process (combining the contexts of follow-up to conference activities and the various reviews scheduled);

(iii) Impact and content of basic social services (to enable a centralized study of world conferences and their impact on the social sector);

(iv) The evolution of the concept of 20/20, as a result of world conferences, and the work ahead;

(c) International Telecommunication Union: Information technology and its impact on the development sector (as an occasion for the Council to examine the development of strategic approaches to the broad issues of global information economy and society, bearing in mind the recommendations of the Administrative Committee on Coordination in this respect (see E/1997/54 and Corr. 1);

(d) The United Nations Environment Programme: Oceans, from various perspectives such as the law of the sea, marine environment and sustainable use;

(e) World Food Programme: Reform and revitalization measures undertaken within the authority of the heads of the various United Nations bodies (as an opportunity to share within United Nations members the important progress that has and can be made within existing structures and mandates);

(f) The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: The role of the United Nations system in fostering national capacity-building (as a priority area in achieving an enabling environment for development).

III. PROPOSALS OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL BODIES

4. The Council was requested by the Fourth World Conference on Women 1/ and by the General Assembly 2/ to devote one high-level segment, one coordination segment and one operational activities segment to the question of gender before the year 2000. Accordingly, in 1997, the cross-cutting theme of the coordination segment of the Council is mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system. Furthermore, in 1996, the Council also considered mainstreaming of gender into poverty eradication activities.

5. In the Habitat Agenda, adopted by the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), it was stated that the Council "may consider dedicating one high-level segment before 2001 to human settlements and the implementation of the Habitat Agenda". 3/ The Council was also requested by the Commission on Human Rights to examine the issue of the right to development at one of its high-level segments. 4/ In the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (Assembly resolution 46/151, annex), the Council was requested to devote part of its high-level segment to the implementation of the new agenda before the Assembly's final review and assessment of that implementation in the year 2002.

IV. ELEMENTS TO BE CONSIDERED IN SELECTING THE THEME

6. In selecting the theme for its high-level segment, the Council may take into account the following considerations:

(a) The Council may choose a major economic and/or social policy theme of topical interest;

(b) The theme should allow for an integrated and interdisciplinary approach;

(c) The theme should enable the Council to receive the maximum benefit from ministerial participation and from the presence of heads of agencies, funds, programmes and other bodies of the United Nations system, including the international trade and financial institutions;

(d) The deliberations of the high-level segment should provide political impetus for building areas of convergence and facilitate the consideration of the issues in question, including the emergence of new recommendations on the issues (Assembly resolution 45/264, annex, para. 5 (d) (i));

(e) It may also be recalled that, in the event a matter of high urgency and priority subsequently emerges that would qualify as a theme for the high-level segment, the Council may, as appropriate, consider that theme as an additional topic for discussion at the high-level segment (Assembly resolution 50/227, annex I, para. 53).

V. PROPOSALS BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

7. Based on the above considerations and proposals, the Secretary-General proposes the selection of one of the following themes, both of which are topical, timely and would be relevant as themes for the high-level segment of the Council:

(a) New dimensions in international development cooperation;

(b) Employment and labour migration.

8. By devoting its high-level segment to the new dimensions in international development cooperation, the Council could make a contribution to the renewal of the dialogue on strengthening international cooperation for development through partnership, which the Assembly decided to launch (resolutions 49/95, 50/122 and 51/174), building on the recently adopted Agenda for Development. It would also be an opportunity for the Council to address the creation of new partnerships for development and to build on its work on participation on non-governmental organizations in development, taking account of experiences of the various bodies of the United Nations system.

9. The theme of employment and labour migration has also been addressed by a number of international conferences, in particular the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development, the World Conference on Women and the World Conference on Human Rights. International migration is an area wnere international cooperation is essential and which cuts across the mandates and activities of several entities of the United Nations system. There has been extensive debate about the relationship between migration and employment in the sending and receiving countries, as well as about the social and economic status of migrant workers in destination countries. Also, there has been a general trend towards strengthening the role of the State in controlling the admission, stay and repatriation of foreign workers through legislation and administrative reforms. A high-level dialogue at the Council would contribute to the debate on these and other related issues. It could also build on the Assembly's examination of the item of migration at its fifty-second session.

Notes

1/ Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, paras. 313-315.

2/ General Assembly resolution 50/203, para. 23; and resolution 51/69, para. 35.

3/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul, 3-14 June 1996 (A/CONF.165/14), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, para. 220.

4/ The Commission on Human Rights, in its resolution 1995/17 on the right to development, recommended that the Council dedicate, as early as possible, the high-level segment of one of its substantive sessions to evaluating the implementation of the Declaration on the Right to Development within the United Nations system, including the work of the international financial institutions and other specialized agencies, Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1995, Supplement No. 3 and corrigenda (E/1995/23 and Corr.1 and 2), chap. II, sect. A).